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Boston University

Graduate School

Thesis

"The Conservatism of William Wordsworth"

by

Edwina John Strong

(A.B., Boston University, 1931)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1934

p7945

INTRODUCTION

This work aims primarily to show that there was a decay in the poetic power of William Wordsworth during the last forty-three years of his life. From the year 1807 until his death in 1850, conservatism dominated both his mind and work. Previous to this period his poetry was mystical and intuitive; but through disappointment and discouragement he changed from radicalism to conservatism. Possessing, as he did, a mind which was both constructive and critical, it was inevitable that he should have changed as he did.

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I. THE AGE OF WORDSWORTH

A. The Age of Individualism

In literature, the Age of Wordsworth is commonly called the Age of Individualism. It was a period when talent, intellect, and taste, as well as ideas, themes and thoughts were individualistic. The writers of this period were all tending toward one end, yet the accomplishments of each of these great men were singular and extraordinary. Individualism was rampant and it was becoming popular with the people as well as with the poets.

1. Character of the times

During Wordsworth's very long lifetime there were happenings of unusual and great importance taking place in the world. In North America, the colonies had been founded and a people was fully established who would, in time, see the rise of one of the greatest countries of the world. The monarchy of France had been overthrown and the old feudal system had toppled with it. Europe did not regain her usual calm until after a host of men had been killed, until after many battles were waged, until after unusual state combinations had been made up, until after the conventions of society had changed, until after extraordinary alterations, in both Europe and England, had taken place.

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England was about the only country that, to any degree, maintained her equilibrium; but here, during Wordsworth's later years, the "new" crept in slowly but surely. After the great battles and the assuming of peace, the new inventions, the industrial and commercial undertakings seemed all the more wonderful to people than if the disastrous struggle had not taken place. It seemed as if wealth had sprung up spontaneously. The middle and lower classes were both represented in politics and government. The laws of the land were more humane than they had ever been before. In a quiet part of the lake district of England, during all the time the fierce and inhuman war raged until a new era was heralded, lived our poet, William Wordsworth, who for fifty years, from 1799 to 1850, was working out in his own quiet way, his own idea and ideal of a poet's life. One can readily imagine all the changes and transitions which occurred during his life and why he was able to see into the deepest and most varying phases of man and nature and "the still, sad music of humanity."

2. Growth of Individualism

Poetry was becoming closer to and more intimate with Nature than it ever had before. It is a little bit inconsistent to realize that the French Revolution, which was waged for the love of Mankind, should have been responsible for the growth of the love of Nature, even to the exclusion of Man. It was in 1798, when Wordsworth revealed his deep love for

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Nature and the response of his soul to her life, that poetry was completely revolutionized.** Even before 1789 men were being liberated by the ideas about mankind, literature and art; and the individualistic movement was most apparent. The French Revolution inspired man everywhere. It was the man of the middle and lower classes and those who did not live in the cities who were of importance; rank and wealth did not count, nor was conventional society recognized. It was common men who were leaders in both the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. The leading poets, who sent forth the ideas, feelings and emotions, were men of the middle classes of society. Poetic England was, in 1789, in an uncertain condition for there were ideas thought of, but only very vaguely, which needed someone to put them into definite form. As time came closer to 1789 the more definite and clearer were the feelings expressed in poems. It was Coleridge and Wordsworth who commenced the new era of poetry for they put ideas into concrete form, which everyone could understand, in "The Lyrical Ballads" of 1798.

The Individualistic urge was greatly felt in the literature of the age, for Individualism was everywhere evident. It approved of the individual man and his right to work out his own fate in his own way. The individualistic poetry maintained that each individual mind should be free to think and act in a fashion to satisfy his own way of living;

**Rev. Stopford A Brooke, "Naturalism in English Poetry"

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the individual instinct should likewise be free to commune with nature or man as it sees fit; the individual heart should be its own guide; the individual conscience should worship God in its own befitting manner; the individual man should live his life freely, simply and in whatever way would make him most satisfied and happy.

3. Wordsworth's Place in the Movement

William Wordsworth is, without doubt, one of the most famous names in English literature. It was he who was destined to relieve the crisis with which the poetical world was confronted. It was he who was to become the defender and supporter of all that was good and pure in English poetry and allow it to assume its rightful place. The principles of the French Revolution had changed the entire outlook of literature. Poetry was to become a plea for freedom, justice and brotherhood; and in this new movement Wordsworth was the leader. Regardless of many unjust attacks and criticisms he was not daunted in the least, for he was assured that he was a dedicated spirit having a divine mission to perform. Wordsworth was a true representative of the new poetry and it is to him that the rebirth of English poetry was due. He probed the heart of mankind and it was he who gave poetry a "vital soul".

Wordsworth was most fortunate in that Nature was such a dominating factor in his life, for there probably has

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Wordsworth was most fortunate in that Nature was much a dominating factor in his life, for there probably has

never been a poet better suited, in temperament or in mode of living, to enjoy Nature, her life, her beauty and soul. He lived a great many years in the section of England in which he was born. He had travelled quite extensively, but not enough to ever let England's place in his heart be usurped. As he became older he enjoyed life, first becoming conspicuous and then quite illustrious, but he was always "on Man, on Nature and on Human Life, musing".

B. Influence of French Revolution

The French Revolution, which started in 1789, influenced all of the English poets from Cowper to Keats. Without a synopsis of this world -- embracing movement, the theme, the form and the emotion of the nineteenth century poetry could not be properly understood.

For two hundred years there had been an undercurrent running throughout the whole of Europe and her people. The idea of the abolition of the Feudal System was rampant; and, finding the path of least resistance, it broke out in France. There were the same ideas in England but they were restrained. While Britain's statesmen and politicians were able to hold the masses in check, they were not able to control the thoughts and minds of their poets and their poetry.

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1. Equality of Mankind

Up until 1832, English poetry dealt with all

sorts of subjects but the chief subject was man, his origin, his rights, his destiny, as seen from a revolutionary point of view. This being true, it is necessary to explain the relationship between Mankind and the French Revolution. The predominating trend of thought from 1589 to 1789 is very well expressed by the Reverend Stopford A. Brooke who said that "there was a universal Mankind, every member of which ought to be free, with equal opportunities and bound each to each as brothers are bound. There was only one country, the country of Mankind, only one nation, the nation of Humanity."* It was this idea which made itself felt in English poetry as early as 1730 and it became more apparent as time went on until, in 1789, it had developed and expanded until it meant that love of country had become one with the love of man.

2. Liberty

Another idea of the French Revolution, as it took its form in poetry, was freedom and liberty. It appealed to the Almighty and it supported the universal brotherhood of man. Wordsworth expressed this thought in his poems and it became a most practical theme for poetry.

3. Return to Nature

The "return to Nature" is the third great idea of the revolution which was developed quite extensively in the poets' works. It maintained that man in the simplest mode of living was happiest. This idea was prevalent in England; but it was Rousseau, the French philosopher, who was

*"Naturalism in English Poetry", Rev. Stopford A. Brooke

truly responsible for its widespread popularity. By 1789, at the outbreak of the French Revolution, it had become the common subject for poetry. The poets, in fact, lived what they wrote -- they returned to nature. They used the most natural of things for their choicest subjects: natural man and his natural life, as well as the natural landscape and surroundings. This idea of the return to Nature became as popular in England as did the idea of universal brotherhood.

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II. THE LIFE OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

A. CHILDHOOD

1. Birth

On the seventh of April, 1770, at Cockersmouth in Cumberland, was born the poet who, early in his life said that "the child is father of the man"*; and he, who was destined to be one of the greatest poets of all time, manifests this throughout his lifetime.

2. First years

William Wordsworth was the second son of a solicitor, and the environment of his early years was very simple and homelike. When he was eight years old, his mother died. He attended the grammar school at Hawkshead which was in the very midst of the lovely English Lake District. It was there that he acquired a fondness for Nature; and to some extent, he seemed to intuitively understand some forms of Nature about which he wrote later with supreme ability and understanding. Even in these years he had a most sensitive ear and eye for Nature; and, with this keenness, he acquired a peculiar feeling for Nature which singled him out to become a Nature poet. These two qualities enabled him to intensify his observations, which supplied his mind with "beauteous forms" which he was to idealize through his imagination.

3. Love of Nature as a child

It was not during school hours that Wordsworth was educated, but rather during early morning walks about Eswaithe when he would sit alone and watch the sunrise while

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3. Love of Nature as a child

It was not during school hours that Wordsworth was educated, but rather during early morning walks about Esmaithe when he would sit alone and watch the sunrise while

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all the country was asleep. It was during these solitary hours that he was most influenced by unseen yet forceful presentiments. It was Nature who was working on his mind so that gradually he enjoyed being in communion with her, and came to prefer her company to any of his other pleasures. From this time on the recollection of Nature in any of her various moods became a part of him. Wordsworth was a boy os unusual quality. This fact may be noted by what he wrote in his more mature years. He said that often he would have to grasp the nearest thing to him, whether it was a tree or a wall, in order to assure himself of the reality of the things he saw about him, so conscious was he of the invisible and mystical presence that was making itself felt in his mind. There is no question that he was blessed with the mystic's consciousness which was closely connected with his poetic power. He was a mystic seer and he was most sincerely a poet; and with the aid of the mystical vision he seemed to understand the universe and the inner character of reality. This, more than anything else was responsible for the "gleam" which is an outstanding characteristic of his genius. It deeply affected his understanding of Nature and the intuitive power which is so keenly felt in much of his poetry. "The vision and the faculty divine" as well as "the light that never was, on sea or land" are the very essences of his poetic ability; and it is this power of vision or intuitiveness which is so closely associated

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with his peculiar mysticism which at times, became trancelike.

4. Beginning of Poetic Vocation

Two different incidents have been recorded which give an insight into the very beginning of the poet's own poetic vocation. The first he, himself, tells us was when he had reached the age of fourteen. It was late in the afternoon when he was walking between Hawkshead and Ambleside* and it was time for the sun to set. The great number of the changing shadows and the blackness of the forest made him selfconscious of a brand new and unaccountable feeling of pleasure. He wondered whether or not any poet had ever before realized the endless moods of Nature in her common appearances. So far as he knew none ever had, and then and there he made up his mind that this would be the sort of poetry that he would write. He had become a lover of Nature in all her aspects without knowing it. The same mental requirements, which guide men toward having an interest in the passing events of surrounding scenery, had made him conscious of the workings of his own intuitive mind and of the dependence of both the external and internal world. Another quality which affected Wordsworth's imagination was his moral sensitiveness. In his early years it had a decided effect upon his fancy, especially his interpretation and intuitiveness of the beauty of Nature.

Four years later, another crisis came in Wordsworth's life. It was during his first vacation from

*-"With Wordsworth in England"- Anna B. McMahon

college when he had gone home to Hawkshead. Wordsworth was returning home from a holiday party which did not break up until the early hours of the morning. On this particular morning the sun was rising, but somehow this was not an ordinary sunrise to him. He says-

"I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
Was given that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated spirit."*

It was during this time, while still a young boy that Wordsworth all alone, recognized those "gleams, like the flashing of a shield"; and at that time he began the steadfast and close communion with Nature that was to fit him to be the high-priest of Nature, her great interpreter. He had been called to become a dedicated spirit; he must accept this vocation or "else sin greatly."

Wordsworth's mind, as a poet of both Nature and Man, in taking into consideration his birth and his childhood, was full of a natural and keen sense of intuitiveness and had as equally an acute imagination which was destined to become extraordinary in its spiritual insight and interpretation.

5. Hawkshead, 1778-1787

Much more important in the development of Wordsworth as a poet and especially as a poet of Nature and Man, than the years of his childhood are those that were spent in

*-"The Prelude" Book IV

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Wordsworth's mind, as a poet of both Nature and Man, in taking into consideration his birth and his childhood, was full of a natural and keen sense of intuitiveness and had as equally an acute imagination which was destined to become extraordinary in its spiritual insight and interpretation.

5. Hawkshead, 1778-1787

Much more important in the development of Wordsworth as a poet and especially as a poet of Nature and Man, than the years of his childhood are those that were spent in

*-"The Prelude" Book IV

Hawkshead, from 1778 to 1787. During these years, while Nature was so close to him and she was working and watching him closely and patiently, the poet of Nature was really brought to life. It was in the lovely surroundings of the country that he knew so well that a poetic ability was born and an insight into the working of life and Nature was developed. Nature and Wordsworth were now on intimate terms. They were close to each other, and she was teaching, guiding and fashioning him. Surely but slowly he was learning to love Nature, and for her own sake alone. These early years in Hawkshead saw the beginning of Wordsworth as a poet of Nature and a poet of Man;* they also witnessed the origin of his poetic imagination which was to express his intuition, his interpretation and idealization of them in his poetry. Towards the end of his days in Hawkshead, when the poet had given his love to Nature, he still maintained the independence of his soul; he was not humbled before this object of his devotion but was ennobled. Up to this time Wordsworth has been revealed as interested in submissive thoughtfulness of Nature, but from now on the active and creative abilities of his mind are going to be manifest and he will be the fashioner instead of the fashioned.

6. Death of Father

In 1783, when Wordsworth was only thirteen years old, his father died, leaving him without a home and without a penny. The estate, which should have been legally divided

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among the five Wordsworth children, was withheld from them for over twenty years. The second son, William, our poet, was the one who seemed to cause the guardians the most worry; but with the aid of his father's two brothers he was able to continue his schooling.

B. Boyhood

1. Entrance to College, 1787

At the age of seventeen, in 1787, Wordsworth went to Cambridge University and became a member of Saint John's College where, his uncles hoped, he would prepare himself for some dignified career. The general life at Cambridge did not appeal to him particularly as he felt very much out of place both by temperament and training. Very often he would leave his fellow students and wander alone through the quiet of the country where his mind could turn to Nature; and although Cambridge did not afford him either the outlook or reverence of his native hills of Hawkshead, yet the bareness of his surroundings led him to find the beauty which Nature had given to a place of this sort. Here, his mystical soul was working and as in his Hawkshead days, he gave a spirit to Nature; whenever the gleam appears in his poetry it is the mystical gleam. The first few months of life at Cambridge were disappointing to Wordsworth for he was most indifferent and his imagination was comparatively dormant.

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Wordsworth renewed his old acquaintances, his spirit was renewed and his mystical consciousness was reawakened. There is a thoughtful feeling in his mental attitude. Nature seems to be subdued in his emotion. There is a sort of calmness and melancholy in his thoughts. He had become conscious of his poetic genius. It was in the midst of the gaieties of this summer vacation that Wordsworth became dedicated to the art of poetry. He realized his talent for poetry. He made no vows, but vows were made for him and be became a "dedicated spirit". When he returned to college in the fall of 1788 his poetic vision and imagination became active.

3. Poems of 1789

"An Evening Walk" written in 1789 was addressed to the poet's sister, Dorothy. This poem and his "Descriptive Sketches" are not quite representative of Wordsworth's true poetic ability, for it was at Racedown where his real career in poetry began. As description, these poems are very good and they manifest a transition going on in his literary style. In his later work, he does not describe but he interprets; but in his early verse he merely records the phenomena which were in sight of his view. By 1790, Nature was still predominant in his mind and the note of sadness that is in his poems of this time is almost unreal in comparison to the joyful note that is in his later works; nevertheless, it is real and it is peculiar to his earlier poems.

4. Meaning of Nature

Wordsworth's intellectual ability was founded on an appreciation of the senses -- there was a true poetic sensuousness which was evident in the poet from his boyhood. With this as a firm foundation, there developed in both his writing and his living a "charm, by thought supplied",-- the deeper significance supplied by his unparalleled faculty of spiritual vision. To Wordsworth, Nature is a holy mystery which he tries, as far as he is humanly able, to solve and impart to Mankind; it is not the feeling of Nature nor is it her sentiments or thoughts of the human heart and mind; but it is the soul of Nature.

5. Interpretation of Nature

Wordsworth's spiritual interpretation of Nature, by his individual handling of natural things, has been successful in imparting that deeper meaning of Nature which neither language nor explanation could fully imply. To his far reaching interpretation he adds "the vision and the faculty divine" and also "the accomplishment of verse". With the aid of his imagination he makes the common everyday world appear as "the light that never was on sea or land". Wordsworth's powerful artistic utterances are his dreams come to life, for he was justly a Nature poet. From his very earliest days he was aware of the beauty and sacredness of Nature because he was blessed with a seeing eye, receptive soul and divine gift of

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spiritual insight; and it is "authentic tidings of invisible things" that Wordsworth wished to pass on to Mankind. His poetry was made to live by his imagination, his emotions, his observations, his power of spiritual explanation, his idealization and descriptions. His love and sympathy for Nature is deep and sincere and there is no doubt that it is to this fact that his power can be traced to solve her many moods and to lay bare the hidden mysteries which are otherwise withheld from those who are not dedicated to the cause.

a. Personification of Nature

Wordsworth truly believed that Nature, in all her forms, was a living being, animated by a heart and soul; and he says in all sincerity-

"-- 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes." *

This idea is one of Wordsworth's individualistic qualifications. The "Lines Composed above Tintern Abbey" better illustrate this belief than do the two above quoted lines:

"For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime

* - "Lines Written in Early Spring"

Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."

Through the power of his interpretation, Wordsworth makes it seem that Nature is a universal life, but at the same time is in each separate part of it. Wordsworth took Nature from out of the fanciful and made her real when he joined together this life of Nature and his idea of God ruling the world.*

6. College Graduation - 1791

He returned once again to Saint John's College to spend a most unadventurous year. He decided to spend his third summer vacation in a trip through the Alps instead of in the accustomed studying for general examinations of his last year in college. This journey would be of interest to him not only from the point of view of Nature, but also from the point of view of Man; and this evidently affirms the idea of Wordsworth's, that was basic in his thinking, that Man and Nature were closely related.

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*-"Naturalism in English Poetry"-Rev. Stopford A. Brooke

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C. Manhood

For a while, after he had graduated from Cambridge, Wordsworth became indifferent; but at the same time, his thoughtful nature acquired a good deal from study and also from associations of such a historic place as Cambridge, where in his wanderings his love of Nature had become intense and his intelligence had broadened to such a degree, that he became somewhat interested in higher mathematics.

1. Leaning toward Mankind

In February of 1791 he journeyed to London; and here, as in Cambridge, the spirit of Nature pervaded him. The city became a source of poetical vision, but the vision was mostly a vision of Mankind. Under Nature's watch he had formulated his ideal of Man long ago, and it did not leave him even when he saw Man in some displeasing aspects. Nor did he relinquish the confidence and faith which he had in him and his destiny. This is idealism of the most beautiful kind. There was also a note of mysticism in Wordsworth's understanding of the city; and this mysticism took him beyond the multitudinous, diverse and sometimes repulsive individual men to the universal man. Wordsworth was primarily interested in Man when he was writing his best poetry. Man was the highest object of his mind and heart and proved to be the source of his chief poetical work. But still, as in his youth, as in college and even now, Nature

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was the queen of his heart and it is through her that he was to be led to Mankind -- to human mankind.

2. Travel on the Continent

Towards the end of 1791, Wordsworth travelled through France in Paris, Orleans and Blois where he remained for nearly a year making friends. He learned a great deal about the customs as well as about the literature of the people.

a. Annette Vallon

During his visit Wordsworth met and loved a girl, Annette, who in later life was known as Madame Vallon. A daughter, Caroline, was born who Wordsworth recognized as his own and to whom he gave his name. Professor Harper calls this episode of the poet's life a "tragic mystery", but it is neither tragic for he had a natural daughter, nor is it a mystery for he wrote some beautiful verses which were inspired by her love.

To justify these seemingly immoral facts, the standards of the times must be spoken of. In the last years of the eighteenth century there was a great deal of corruption, conventions were disregarded, morals were loose and marriage was assailed; and Wordsworth was not twenty-two years old when he arrived in France. "He was a wayward youth, eager to see as much of life as possible",* Emile Legouis writes, and he was lonely and wanted sympathy and love. He met Annette and eventually his desire was realized. Wordsworth returned to

* "Wordsworth in a New Light" Emile Legouis

England intending to have affairs straightened out and obtain the consent of his uncles to return to marry Annette; but the war between France and England broke out. There was tremendous danger in Wordsworth's returning to Annette's country because he was an Englishman and because he sympathized with the Girondists. He continued writing to Annette and contributed to the support and upbringing of their daughter.

This association was the inspiration of one of Wordsworth's poems. In "Vaudracour and Julia" the name Annette needs only to be substituted for that of Julia and there is the story of Wordsworth's love and his involuntary departure.* There does not seem to be any evidence that any other poems were inspired by Annette.

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D. The French Revolution in the Poet's Life

1. Awakening

Late in 1792 Wordsworth returned to Paris for he had been prepared by his living and education to understand and sympathize with the principles of the great social and political French Revolution. He still retained his faith in the Revolution; in fact he had become very well acquainted with events and men of the uprising. These two interests are representative of the two great loves of the poet's life: the love of Nature and the love of Mankind.

The ideals of the Revolution, "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" had aroused Wordsworth's patriotic feelings. He was no longer indifferent; but he was carried along by his zeal for the cause so much that he was imbued with republicanism in spite of his natural conservatism in which he was brought up and educated. It was quite evident that, under the sway of political events, a crisis was drawing near in the poet's life, for both his spiritual and mental activity were restored.

It was essentially through the French Revolution that Wordsworth became interested in Man. There is no question that his feeling toward Man was intensified and the bitterness he had felt toward him during his college days was off-set. The idea of Man's unity dawned upon him and again idealized his thoughts of Man. His love of Man continued to grow until it over shadowed his great love for Nature.

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2. Growing love for Man

As a child, Wordsworth had looked upon Man as merely a part of Nature. In London, the immensity of the city and the secluded life he led had ennabled him to awaken again his ideal of Man which had become so muddled during his college life. It may be seen that Wordsworth had procured, in his early days, an idea of Mankind and of his destiny. To this he stubbornly clung, even during the time that Nature was first with him. His soul was full of zeal and his brain was full of theories; but at the end of a fifteen-month stay in France he had a sudden and terrible awakening from his dreams, and before the beginning of the Reign of Terror in 1793, the wisdom of some of his friends forced him to return to England.*

3. Poem of 1793

It was in this same year, 1793,that "Guilt and Sorrow", whose theme is dark and dismal, was written. The events in the two connected stories, crime and poverty, are probable but they are not well constructed. The theme was suggested by the poet's observation of the English destitute people. It is altogether a most sordid and depressing poem.

4. Reaction of French Revolution

The excessiveness of the disasters of the French Revolution brought about a reaction in Wordsworth's soul that made him a conservatist for the remainder of his life. Not yet discouraged by the facts and what he hopes would be, there

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came to him the question whether the Revolution would end by honest and upright means. He tried to remedy the evils he saw and he thought that the fate of Man, now as always, rested with a few of the chosen people. Though his mind was tormented, his heart aggravated, his confidence maintained his hope of brighter days ahead. In the Reign of Terror, there was a sort of fearful poetry and he supported it with a fearful joy and delight. All these dominating opinions and hopes were only shallow upsets of his mind. The Revolution did more than disturb the surface of him, it convulsed the very depths of his soul spiritually, mentally and morally. There came the time, when disgusted and discouraged almost beyond hope, he "yielded up moral questions in despair".

a. <u>"The Prelude"</u>

The truths of the French Revolution were written by Wordsworth in their full force and value in "The Prelude". This piece of poetry, the first six books of which were in the writing from 1799 to 1805 and which were completed by 1814, showing the growth of the poet's mind, is singular in its characteristic power as a picture from childhood and schooldays, through adolescence, and through the immense happenings to the time where it found its own strength and was ready to prove it. The three books that tell of Wordsworth's stay in France have an important value. In booke nine, ten and eleven, the very spirit and heart of the

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tragedy is told in simple and sincere truths. There is the severity and restraint of a classic tragedy and like the classic tragedy it has a noble ending. The French Revolution was a crisis in Wordsworth's mental life and it was a forceful attack on his soul; but when he emerged from it he was greater that he had ever been before.

b. Moral despair and crisis

Wordsworth was also very much affected by the nationalistic spirit of the age. It is in the eleventh book of"The Prelude" that he outlines the mental changes under the pressure of the times. This book begins quite joyously and with a note of optimism, but ends in the temporary downfall of his poetic vision, in his loss of the spirituality of Nature as well as the loss of his faith in Man and in his own moral skepticism and despair. The harmony which had existed between his revolutionary ideas and his natural feelings suddenly became discordant. It ceased on the day that Britain declared war on the Republic of France. Now the pride that he had had in his own country changed to shame, and this catastrophe, had it happened in his later years, would not have upset him emotionally as it did now -- it struck at the very center of his moral being and heart. The moral shock of it is important inasmuch as it proved to be one of the most influential factors in determining his career as a poet and indirectly affecting the form and content of his poetry. This attack not only

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grieved him seriously but it upset the balance of his entire nature. It broke down his imagination and dulled his faith and it lost for him both his new confidence in Man and his old love in Nature. There was nothing for him to enjoy or believe in now. Things were getting worse in France, but still he did not release his hold on his reflective thought but he followed it up more thoroughly. So far did he follow it up that it led him to moral despair. Little by little the ties which bound him to France let go their hold on him and as his feelings became more distant, he began to transfer his affection to his own theories.

His whole life was to be devoted to the recovery of his former frame of mind and heart. He satisfied himself, to an extent, by abstract reasoning; and he freed himself from his pessimism by writing about it in a tragedy in 1795 called "The Borderers".* The result was that he again took heart and was in a frame of mind where "sometimes he believed and sometimes he doubted. So critical and suspicious did he become that ultimately nothing could be accepted without proof."** His philosophy had come to a disgraceful ending and led him into moral skepticism. Besides this, Wordsworth's mind became nothing but a mechanical machine. He looked at Man and Nature with a reasoning eye. Mysticism had gone. In spite of these changes, it was during these crucial times that the Poet of

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Man was born, and it was through Nature that it was accomplished with unfortunate results at first for it destroyed his faith in Man as well as men, and he was in spiritual darkness, too.*

5. Influence of Dorothy

After some time of depression, mortification, bewilderment and disappointment the old faith was returning. Wordsworth did not recover immediately from the depths of his moral agony in which he had been engulfed by political events and by his loss of faith. As depressed as he was, however, he never became bitter or cynical for he loved reflective thought too much to lead a mentally idle life.

For his mental and moral recovery, Wordsworth was greatly indebted to his sister, Dorothy. With her for a companion, he slowly but surely was regaining his healthy outlook on life; but as for becoming enthusiastic over any public cause -- that was impossible. It is said that heated liberalism, when so suddenly cooled is very likely to pass into very rigid conservatism. As Wordsworth grew older he distrusted, more and more, any drastic changes or any vigorous reforms.

In the mental changes through which the poet was going, with Nature uppermost in his mind, he finally acknowledged the supremacy to Man; and he also recognized that it was Dorothy, his beloved sister, who guided the way, who helped

*-"Early Life of Wordsworth"-Emile Legouis

him to gradually recover what he thought had been lost to him forever.

E. Racedown and Alfoxden 1795-1799

1. Racedown and its influence

It was six years after his return from France that Wordsworth was released from that crisis; and it was in the midst of it that his wanderings came to an end for he was to settle down and have the comforts of a home, something that he had not enjoyed for many years. It was in Racedown that Wordsworth settled in 1795. It was here that his true career as a poet started; it was here, too, that his name and power of genius were to be forever associated. The other influence, when he began that endearing comradeship with his sister which remained unbroken to the end of their lives, was the acquaintance of Coleridge.

2. Poems of the Period

Wordsworth's first poetical work, at Racedown was "The Borderers". It was a rather unfortunate venture and the only interesting thing about it is that it might have a personal touch indicating just how Wordsworth's mind was reacting after his critical experience and struggles. He, himself, admitted this mysterious drama to be a failure, although he placed it with his other works after having kept it unpublished for forty years.

The next and first enjoyable poem, rather a long one, during this period was the story of Margaret or "The Ruined Cottage" as it was originally named, but which resulted in

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It was six years after his return from France that Wordsworth was released from that cricle; and it was in the midst of it that his wanderings came to an end for he was to settle down and have the comforts of a home, something that he had not enjoyed for many years. It was in Racedown that Wordsworth settled in 1795. It was here that his true career as a poet started; it was here, too, that his name and power of genius were to be forever associated. The other influence, when he began that endearing comradeship with his sister which remained unbroken to the end of their lives, was the acquaintance of Coleridge.

2. Poems of the Period

Wordsworth's first poetical work, at Racedown was "The Borderers". It was a rather unfortunate venture and the only interesting thing about it is that it might have a personal touch indicating just how Wordsworth's mind was reacting after his critical experience and struggles. He, himself, admitted this mysterious drama to be a failure, although he placed it with his other works after having kept it unpublished for forty years.

The next and first enjoyable poem, rather a long one, during this period was the story of Margaret or "The Ruined Cottage" as it was originally named, but which resulted in

being the first book of "The Excursion".

3. Change in attitude of mind

After the Wordsworths were settled in Racedown, the poet spent a great deal of his time in reading, writing and walking. His mental condition was changing gradually. He began to find new faith in man; this was partly accomplished by his talking with strangers whom he met in his walks. The outcome of his conversations with these people was his decision to make Man the main subject of his song: common man, under common circumstances, in common language. His views on Nature were also secured in his recovery. Both his moral and spiritual health were regaining strength; and with them was returning peace of mind and serenity of soul. He was beginning again "to see into the life of things".

This recovery period began at Racedown and was completed at Alfoxden, in Somersetshire, where William and Dorothy moved to in July, 1797. This was a most opportune move as it proved to be one of the most productive, as well as one of the happiest, periods in the poet's life, for it was here amid the surroundings and companionship of friends that he made such rapid progress toward spiritual and mental health. His love for Annette Vallon was completely dead by this time. It was here that his acquaintance with Samuel Taylor Coleridge grew into friendship and it was here also, that the "Lyrical Ballads" were written. The real motive for leaving Racedown

to settle in Alfoxden, according to Dorothy Wordsworth, was the desire to have the society of Coleridge. The friendship proved to be a very strong one and lasting one even though their genius was unlike, as were their characters and fortune; but, on the other hand, there were many things they had in common and they proved to be mutually beneficial. Wordsworth may have been influenced by Coleridge's mysticism but he did not take any of it for his own; but it is evident that his mental attitude was affected by his friendship with Coleridge. To prove this only a comparison of "Descriptive Sketches", written in 1792, with the first books of "The Prelude", written in 1799, need be made. Identical incidents are told in both poems, but there is a much deeper philosophy of human life and nature in the later work than there is in his first poems. From 1797 Wordsworth's greatest ambition WAS to write "Some philosophic song of Truth that cherishes our daily life".* Most of the poems which he wrote at Alfoxden were short and of common man, such as "Simon Lee", and "We Are Seven".

a. "Lyrical Ballads"

By the middle of 1798, the two poets published a volume of verse, anonymously, calling it "Lyrical Ballads". The book ended with "Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey", which expresses the poet's philosophy of Nature and which explained the mood that followed his youthful receptive one which was replaced by "other gifts" with "abundant

*-"William Wordsworth"- C. T. Winchester

recompense". It was in this same year that he also wrote the beautiful "Lines Written in Spring". Following the "Lyrical Ballads" Wordsworth's works seem to have a different tone and it is first evident in "Ruth", a narrative and then in "Michael", the pastoral idyll. These poems are sincere and simple enough but the early daring of style is lacking.

5. Poetic style from 1798-1818

The years between 1798 and 1818 are acknowledged to be the best of Wordsworth's poetical life. During this time the poet was writing poetry that was worthy of his genius. He conformed, in detail, to his theory of poetry for he used simple man and simple incidents. His words overflowed with pure sweetness, and there was a charm about them which made his poems memorable and humanly profound. They were natural and indeed spontaneous. For example the following lines:

"My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So it was when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety." *

The style of his writing during these twenty years was typical

*-"My heart leaps up when I behold"- 1802

of his better works, it was straight-forward, forceful, and vigorous. During these years Wordsworth's genius "poured itself out like an unfailing fountain". His work is simple, sincere, and spirited; at the same time it evidences the struggle that was going on in the poet and shows the hope he had in the new democracy of the times. This body of work was a foreshadowing of poetic development of an age.

a. Theory of Poetry

Early in the poet's career he had become definitely determined on most of his views concerning poetry, and these views were most daring. If he had not been a man of his own convictions, he never would have published them. He was a great poet in spite of them. Briefly, this theory dismisses artificial diction of the Classical writers and employs the common language of the common people. It also maintained that everything in Nature regardless of how lowly it might be, could be idealized and in that manner become material for poetry. In the year 1800, a preface to the second edition of the "Lyrical Ballads",with other Poems" was published. In this was a rather lengthy discussion of the poet's point of view on poetry. Wordsworth, indeed, released poetry from the conventional classical characteristics when he assailed artificial diction, allegories, antithesis, personification, barren rime and metre. He said that "every great poet was a teacher" and he wished to be considered as such or as nothing. The important

teaching of Wordsworth, which is seen in all of his poems from the first to the last, is that at the foundation of all life and matter there is a Supreme Being whom everyone must recognize, and whose personality is evident in all varieties of human nature and who is a guide and protector to each and every individual. These teachings are firm beliefs which must be accepted without any explanation, for

"--Be they what they may
Are yet the fountain light of all our day."*

His aim in life was to make evident the fact that the outer world and the inner mind, by mutually conforming, could make a heaven from the "simple produce of a common day".

6. Wordsworth's Individualism

Wordsworth was not a student; neither did he spend much time with books nor was he at all acquainted with the development of English literature, as a whole; but he did stand apart for he had no advisers and no pattern. Wordsworth's idea of Nature was individual and new. Practically all of English poetry dealt with Nature, but it was never written of in the manner which was peculiar to Wordsworth. What makes his treatment of Nature so individual is the emphasis that he places upon her moral influences. He was one of the most outstanding poets of the Individualistic Age. His special gift, his own individualism of character, his thought and poetic creed,were faith in the value and significance of what

*-"Ode on Intimations of Immortality"

men ordinarily call the common-place. His eternal contribution and claim is in the unusual sincerity, ardor and insight with which he is able to idealize and then glorify the whole natural world. Not satisfied with having done this, he gives it life and a soul; it becomes a presence which follows man around when he is at work "breathing grandeur upon the very humblest face of human life." In "words that speak of nothing more than what we are" he showed new forms and phases of Nature and he also acquainted man with man, as man. The best poetry of Wordsworth could only have come from the mind and pen of a man who was utterly independent of the literary standards of the time, for he owes his genius to Nature, and not to literature. He rises to a height of profound thought and feeling to which no literary comrade could have led him, and his writings are most distinctive and individual.

7. Poet of Man

Wordsworth was among the first in England who turned from the grandeur of the cities and wrote about Man in the countryside where he was happy in his simplicity. Nature was first with Wordsworth and Man held second place; but he began to change his ideas concerning this creature of God. During his stay in London and the time he spent in France the place of Nature was being taken by Man. It was a tremendous transition and it took time to be accomplished. In reviewing his life he realized that since his childhood,

when he was first conscious of his great love for Nature, he was also conscious that Nature was developing in him a love for Man. Nature was his guide and through her he recognized and developed his sympathy for Man. As he grew older, Wordsworth came in direct contact with natural objects. This also aided in the development of his love for Man. He considered Man to be the highest creation of Nature and he recognized this simultaneously with his becoming a dedicated spirit. Even when he was quite old, and the younger idea of simplicity and naturalness of life was not quite so vivid to him, he began to think of Man as he had always thought of Nature -- with a sense of sublimity.

8. Faith Regained

By this time Wordsworth's faith in man was restored along with his own self identity. The bond that connected his early years with those of his later life was peace, joy and happiness; but now this happiness was not the spontaneous happiness that he knew long ago, it was a thoughtful and reflective one of which he was conscious. The joy was merely lightheartedness at first and then it grew into optimism which became his prevailing temper. His reason turned once again to Nature and the joy of living. His cheerfulness returned simultaneously with his return to Nature, he became optimistic, he believed in reality. His resolve to write about common things among common men resulted in his becoming

the Poet of Man as well as the Poet of Nature. During the Alfoxden days, Wordsworth's poetry was concerned with Man and Nature and their relation to each other. It is this kind of poetry that is called "Wordsworthian" for in this he is able to "see into the life of things" and in these poems "the vision and the faculty divine" are present. The Nature poems of this period, likewise, have this same intuitiveness and love of humanity and life in their relation to the spirit of Man.* Proof of this is seen in the following lines:

"Come forth into the light of things
Let Nature be your teacher.

She has a world of ready wealth,
Our minds and hearts to bless---
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.

.....

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings

.....

Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives." **

9. German Trip and Poems

Late in 1798 Dorothy Wordsworth and the poet left for Germany. They spent the winter months in Goslar; and it was while there that Wordsworth recollected his early years at Hawkshead. It was during his stay in Germany that he wrote some of his most beautiful lyrics, the "Matthew" poems

* "With Wordsworth in England"-Anna Benneson McMahon
** "The Tables Turned"

and the five exquisite "Lucy" poems. There are no other lyric poems that are as touching and as tender. The following eight lines are an example of the type of verse Wordsworth was writing at this time:

"A slumber did my spirit steal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees." *

It seems almost possible that they must have commemorated some sacred memory of his own, yet there has been no known word of comment about them from the author. Other poems written during this tour were "Ruth",** a story of moral evil, which explains that Nature's influence, as long as it is in harmony with humanity, is beneficial to Mankind; "Two April Mornings," a story of common man, his honest and simple feelings and thoughts changed into a poetical ideal world. "The Poet's Epitaph" is typically Wordsworthian in its description of a poet's genius and limitations.

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F. Grasmere and Coleorton 1800-1806

1. Poet of Nature

When the Wordsworths returned to England, at the beginning of 1800, it was in Dove Cottage at Grasmere that they settled, primarily on Nature's account. The beautiful surroundings were responsible, in a large degree, for the prolific poetry which Wordsworth produced there. He was decidedly conservative in all that he wrote and he was affected by a heart and mind that helped to a clearer insight to Nature. Wordsworth admitted that he was Nature's prophet and that he would serve her with a pure and clean heart. The trance which he had suffered in his early years was not the potent one in his life; it was the "saner" mood* in which reality, or the common world, did not fade from his sight, but whose internal nature was shown in the poet's mystical soul as a Spiritual life which finally confirmed his beliefs of Man in relation to Nature. This mood was the dominating one, in which most of his best poetry was written while at Grasmere. It was his own natural inclinations and serenity of mind that prepared him to become the poet of humanity as well for he felt that he was a dedicated spirit whose task was a divine calling.**

2. Poems of 1800 and 1801.

During the year of 1800, Wordsworth wrote a great many poems. The first and second books of "The Prelude" were written; the composition of "The Recluse" was begun, although

*-WWilliam Wordsworth" - E. Hershey Sneath
**-"Theology in English Poets"- Stopford A. Brooke

it was not published in complete form until 1888. The poem, "Michael", in which Wordsworth is very near his best, is a simple story which the poet heard in his younger days and it had remained in his mind until it represented to him the sorrows of humanity. Mr. Winchester tells the story in the following one sentence; "A plain mountain shepherd, who when eighty-four years of age was forced by hard poverty to send the only son of his old age to the city, and who lived on among his hills in stern and silent loneliness years after his boy had gone to the bad."* The "Poems on the Naming of Places" are too particular and too personal to read, for they tell of the poet's own friends and habits. "Peter Bell" is perhaps one of Wordsworth's most characteristic poems. It is a unique illustration of the influence of Nature on a superstitious soul.

3. Marriage and Poems in 1802

In 1802, Wordsworth married Mary Hutchinson and managed to retain the friendship of Annette Vallon. His marriage and the receiving of a legacy from a friend were a two-fold blessing. The year previous to Wordsworth's marriage was a very barren poetical one; but in 1802 the most of the first two books of "The Excursion" were written and "The Leech-Gatherer", a story of his own experience showing his dejection in the first part of the poem, was also written. It was impossible for him to continue writing on "The Prelude" at this time because his political points of view were too unsettled

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but he did compose some of his best and most beautiful sonnets, the most famous of which was "To Toussant L'Ouverture". Other of these early sonnets, which are considered masterpieces are: "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" which was written at day-break on September 3, 1802; and the sonnets "London" and "Near Dover". These and other patriotic sonnets were written when Wordsworth feared about the indifference of Englishmen. They show that his ideals of duty to his native country had not been diminished.* During this eventful year there seemed to be the foreshadowing of a change in the poet. There is the beginning of "something" in him which was to fully develop before very many more years had passed.

4. Tour of Scotland, 1803

In the summer of 1803, just a few days after his son, John, had been born, Wordsworth and Dorothy left for a tour of Scotland with the intention of being gone about two months. The poetic result of this tour was about fifteen poems, the best of which were "At the Grave of Burns", "The Solitary Reaper", "Yarrow Unvisted", and "To a Highland Girl".

5. Event and Poems of 1804

In the summer of 1804 the second Wordsworth baby was born, named Dorothy, but called Dora; aside from this there were no other important happenings or events in the life of the poet. There were very few poems written in this quiet year. "Vaudracour and Julia", "I Wandered lonely as a cloud",

*-"William Wordsworth" Vol II - George McLean Harper

"She was a Phanton of Delight" and "The Affliction of Margaret" although in this latter there is internal evidence that it was of a much earlier date, were written.

6. Death of John Wordsworth, 1805

In 1805, came the news of the death of John Wordsworth, the poet's sailor brother. It was five years before his death that he had left the Wordsworth home to join his ship, from which he never returned. Neither Wordsworth nor Dorothy ever recovered from this great grief. At first, Wordsworth was in a daze from grief, so much so that for a time he did not do any writing whatever and what did start him writing again was the inspiration to write about John, his dead brother. As a result of these efforts the two poems "Ode to Duty" and the "Character of the Happy Warrior" were begun.

7. A change in Wordsworth

It was in 1805 that Wordsworth climaxed his poetical genius. Most of the shorter poems of that year were, in some way, connected with the great grief that had come into his life. One fact that is peculiar is that Wordsworth, himself, believed that a change had taken place within him before this time; but in studying his life and works it is quite evident that it is during this momenteous year that he once again turned to Nature for solace, and he became quite satisfied with conventional society. He made up his mind to be happy and it was with a faith that was so deep and sincere that

it became a true part of him. Yet, all in all, the crisis in Wordsworth's life did him no harm as either a man or a poet; if anything it gave him a more sympathetic and deeper sense of kindness toward mankind, and it ennabled him to hear "The still sad music of humanity".* It was this crisis which, in reality, determined the form and material of his poetry. After his political hopes and aspirations had been crushed, he depended almost entirely upon Nature. And when he reached this time of life, he also reached the zenith in his writing; and it was a result of the foregoing crisis that he became the poet of Man as much as he was the poet of Nature. Wordsworth was solving the question of Life. He believed that it was worthwhile provided it had the foundation of a belief in God, a belief in immortality, and a belief in the virtue of mankind. He believed that suffering was good for man for it helped build his strength of character. Most of all, Wordsworth believed in the dependence of Man on Nature. In this attitude of mind and soul, in October 1806 the Wordsworth household left for Sir George Beaumont's estate in Coleorton, remaining only a few months.

8. Poems of 1805 and 1806

During the years of 1803 to 1807, Wordsworth wrote about fifty poems besides his five greatest ones, namely "Ode to Duty", "Character of the Happy Warrior", "Song at Feast of Brougham Castle", "Ode on Intimations of Immortality", and "The Prelude", which was finished in the summer of 1805.

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At no other time in his life did the poet ever write more sonnets. He continued to show a great interest in what was going on in Europe, and he wrote his twenty-six memorable patriotic and national sonnets. He was still a poet of liberty, with the understanding that freedom must remain within the law. This feeling was in keeping with the attitude of his own nature, even if, in his youth, he did write

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
But to be young was very heaven." *

a. "Ode to Duty"

The "Ode to Duty" was, no doubt, inspired by the death of the poet's beloved brother and it is a reflection of his life and heroic death. In the "Ode to Duty" Wordsworth maintained that obedience is far more important in life than is joy, for life is based on a more significant principle. The "Ode to Duty" is an answer to the questions concerning joy and its relation to life.

b. "Elegiac Stanzas"

In the "Elegaic Stanzas suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, painted by Sir George Beaumont", the poet writes

"So once it would have been,--'tis so no more;
I have submitted to a new control:
A power is gone, which nothing can restore;
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c. "The Character of the Happy Warrior"

"The Character of the Happy Warrior" was written in the early part of 1806 just when the sadness of Wordsworth, because of his brother's death, was turning to happiness. Here, also, is the principle that obedience is a fundamental factor in life and it is a picture in verse of the ideal British character.

d. "The Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle"

"The Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle" was written in 1807 and it is a combination of both his simple and grand style of poetry. It begins with the simple rusticity of shepherd life, it progresses to chivalry and ends with serene peace of eternity. Up to the end of the minstrel's appeal to God the poem is simply a ballad; but then in only four powerful stanzas as the scene is obliterated and it becomes reality, the common world of man:

"Love had he found in huts where poor men be;
His daily teacher had been woods and rills,
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills!"

e. "Ode on Intimations of Immortality"

In this extraordinarily productive period the "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" was written, although the first four stanzas were written as early as 1802. Here the poet spoke tenderly of the ideas and emotions experienced

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in childhood; of the mysterious coming of the human soul, its progress and destiny which convey thoughts that "are too deep for tears". The poem maintains that

"The child is father of the man"*

and that

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath elsewhere had its setting
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!"
"Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
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valuable and that the instincts of the child should be obeyed for he is closer to truth than man and finds Nature to be the best teacher. In the last two stanzas there is a decided change in philosophy for Man and reason claims him, but he again repeats his vows to Nature.

f. "The Prelude"

"The Prelude", or the autobiographical account of the growth of the poet's mind was completed in 1805, when his genius was at its peak. There are about eight thousand lines of personal experiences, ideas, thought and moods and is a most complete record of his career; it is also the explanation to all of Wordsworth's later works. Professor Shairp, in his lecture on "Poetic Interpretation of Nature" says; "It was as though one who had been long gazing on some building grand and fair, admiring the vast sweeps of its walls and the strength of its battlements, without understanding their principle of coherence, were at length to be admitted inside by the master-builder, and given a view of the whole plan from within, the principles of architecture and the hidden sub-structures upon which it was built. This is what "The Prelude" does for the rest of Wordsworth's poetry."*

1. A. Posthumous Poem

There is no question but what "The Prelude" was revised by the poet; but in spite of the changes he made, it did not receive the usual meticulous attention of alteration that it would have if Wordsworth had intended to publish it

*-"The Prelude", A. J. George

during his life-time. This poem did not appear until after the author had died; the manuscript, which had resided in his desk, contained many verses which could have been smoother and other lines which could have been made less obscure. Wordsworth was rather dissatisfied with the poem and as he became older and more conservative many of the lines he had originally written were changed to coincide with his later point of view. The fact that "The Prelude" was to be a posthumous work did not lessen Wordsworth's ambition and interest in it, for he knew that his fame depended upon posterity. He realized the failings of the poem and he was determined to eliminate or, at least, to improve them. For nearly forty years he continually made revisions in "The Prelude". There were technical corrections made, there were lines omitted here, a descriptive passage added there, or perhaps some early view was softened. As a result, the version of 1850 does not quite truly represent the social, political and spiritual attitudes which the poet enjoyed up to and before 1805. "From the Mss", DeSelincourt says, "now for the first time examined in detail, we are able to note the nature and the extent of the alterations introduced into the text; and a fresh light is thrown, not only upon the changes which came over the poet's mind, but also upon the principles and methods as an artist."** The poem, even if it had been published when Wordsworth completed it, would have had some alterations; but the 1850 text is a very much better

*"William Wordsworth" Vol. II - George McLean Harper
**"The Prelude" edited by Ernest DeSelincourt

one than the original. There was no fundamental change in style, but there was a decided improvement in it. Despite the poet's greatly diminished creative energy, his critical power was still keen and some of the last changes in "The Prelude" were the best.

When Wordsworth wrote the fourteenth book of this poem, it was quite discernible that his verses lacked the freshness and simplicity of his earlier poems; his intuitiveness was gone; the daring of his genius had vanished. With advanced age, he had lost his inspiration and seeing power, for he had become a less poetic genius. The only necessary changes needed were those to improve the diction and those to develop or simplify the meaning of the original text; any others were not in accord with the original attitude in which the poem was composed. The first revisions were in keeping with Wordsworth's youthful spirit; but those made in his more mature years were necessarily quite different. "The Prelude" is a great poem; and with the exception of the poet's exclusion of the facts concerning Annette Vallon, which thereby falsified, to a degree, the story of his life,* it is a sincere and true autobiography of a great man.

*- "The Later Wordsworth" - Edith C. Batho

G. Rydal Mount 1815-1850

A. Conservatism from 1807-1815

1. Signs of Conservatism

It is generally known that between 1807 and 1815, Wordsworth's attitude and development as a poet underwent a radical change. As the years went by, he naturally lost his enthusiasm for and interest in the march of events and his soul clung to England as he found her; at the same time his spirit avoided France. This alteration inevitably changed his outlook on man and society. His poetic genius was shattered and his imagination was passive. At this time, the poetry of Wordsworth commenced to deal chiefly with moral ideas, thoughts and incidents such as the lines

"Avaunt all specious pliancy of mind
In men of low degree, all smooth pretence!
I better like a blunt indifference,
And self-respecting slowness, disinclined
To win me at first sight: and be there joined
Patience and temperance with this high reserve.
Honor that knows the path and will not swerve;
Affections, which, if put to proof, are kind;
And piety towards God."*

His poems lost their fresh briskness and their intuitive sense; instead of these qualities of the earlier poetry there were dignity and lofty elements, and the themes became almost too deep for words. The conservatism in Wordsworth probably had

*-"Avaunt All Specious Pliancy of Mind".

3. Rydal Mount 1813-1850

A. Conservatism from 1807-1815

1. Signs of Conservatism

for its foundation his disgust with radicalism. He still disliked any form of oppression and he still maintained his love for liberty. This love of liberty was the basis of his conservatism. It was his reserved ethical nature, his love of the old, his dislike of trouble, which had been important in helping him maintaim an equilibrium in his enthusiasm for the French Revolution, that became more dominant and emphatic when England and France had disgusted him, and it betrayed him in his old age. Regardless of this, he continued to believe in the common people and he took the side of constitutional statesmanship.

a. Conservative poems

After 1805, when Wordsworth had become conservative in both his thinking and writing, his poetry had become often so deep and profound that it often outdistanced the stretch of the imagination. Some of his poems written between 1814 and 1820, when the change had overtaken him ("The Vernal Ode", "Laodamia", "Dion", "The Longest Day") seem to have lost the peculiar intuitiveness of his earlier works. They are solemn, dignified, reflective, conservative and didactic.

2. Morality of Wordsworth

The morality of Wordsworth makes him most puzzling, but he cannot be classed as a didactic poet, or a poet who wanted to put forth religious thoughts and moral ideas in verse.* If these were the main trends of his poetry, he might have been

*-"Wordsworth, His Life and Works"-Andrew James Symington

classed with the more famous moralists and religious writers. From his youth, the moral influence and character of poetry had been in the forefront of his mind. Early in his career, he made up his mind to write moral poetry. It was in the first book of "The Prelude" that he said he was well equipped with truth and with his own deep seeing soul to write such poetry. His moral poems certainly do not lack the gift of the power of understanding and teaching. "Ode to Duty", "The Happy Warrior", and the "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" all written during or after 1805, are the best examples of his moral teaching. He constantly emphasized the truths that were the guarantees and securities for the demands of morality. Wordsworth taught that as the child grows into boyhood and then into manhood, he is continually losing a certain charm of young life, and his reasoning and ideas become slowed up and are different. It is from this Platonic truth that Wordsworth revealed and taught those vague perceptions which are the basis of our moral nature. He has looked deep within the soul of man and it is only he who can make the power of moral law felt in its simplicity.

3. Rydal Mount 1813
   a. "The Excursion"

In the third month of 1813, the poet accepted the government office of distributor of stamps of Westmoreland--a position with light duties and a permanent salary. Due to this financial aid he moved from Grasmere to Rydal Mount. In

1814, the Wordsworths visited Scotland for the third time; and this tour resulted in the writing of half a dozen poems. It was during the summer that "The Excursion" was completed. It was to have been the second part of a triplicate poem on Nature, Man and Society. The first part was to have been "The Recluse" in three parts; but only one part of this first book was written*, which was not published until 1888. The third part was merely planned. "The Prelude", which resulted in a separate work, was to have been the introduction. This separate poem, as has been stated, was completed and published in 1805. "The Excursion" musing on solitude, manifests the two Wordsworths: the young, intuitive man and the mature conservative man. In 1814, when this work was published, the poet has already experienced and had recognized a great change in himself. He had definitely become a Conservative for he had attained that quiet, peaceful happiness in reflective thought, concerning both Man and Nature. The "Wanderer" represented Wordsworth, a young man, when he felt the spirit of Nature and when he realized she had a soul and personality and that he was her dearly beloved worshipper. The entire poem assumes that a simple man, leading a simple life in simple surroundings is a fitting subject for a poet to write upon because of the philosophical depths that may thereby be attained. The later"Wanderer" takes issue at the young child working in the factory. Wordsworth, the conservative answers the charge by saying he believes in class distinction, but also

*"Wordsworth" E. Hershey Sneath

in universal morality. This passage is one of the most forceful in the whole of "The Excursion"; and it is typically representative of the kind of material that is used in this lengthy poem; still it is not entirely of a prosaic spirit. There are some lines that can barely be called poetry, and still other passages are unsurpassed for beauty of description. The poem is didactic when it is compared to a lyric poem; but comparing it to a didactic poem it has intrinsic and permanent value.

4. Developed Conservatism

In May of 1815, while Wordsworth was in London, "The Doe of Ryleston" or "The Fate of the Nortons" was published. In the late months of this year, the Wordsworths were greatly disturbed by the political tidings from France. Their uneasiness was personal because of their domestic interests that were in that country;* and in knowing this it is not difficult to see why Wordsworth came to dislike and even to hate France. He looked upon her as a country whose struggle for Liberty resulted in a rule of tyranny. For many years the ghastly events and the horrors of it stalked in his mind and imagination. This change in his mind and heart toward a country which he once so strongly approved of, caused a like change and a new adaptation of his points of view. His aims, at this time in life, were the reverse of what they had been, and they did not inspire him poetically in any way. For some time he was torn between his early love for

*"William Wordsworth", George McLean Harper (Vol II)

Man and his later feeling toward him. But as he became more contemplative, he buoyed up his belief in the essential nature of mankind.

In the poems of this time his natural intuitiveness is utterly lacking. This quality was replaced by an intellectual reasoning and a conservative reflection as is shown in the following five verses:

"Who wants the glorious faculty assigned
To elevate the more-than-reasoning Mind,
And colour life's dark cloud with orient rays.
Imagination is that sacred power,
Imagination lofty and refined."*

Wordsworth had lost faith in the time in which he lived, and, of course, this included his despair of Man and Nature, for they were both closely related. With this loss he looked upon Man with his intellect and judgment rather than with his heart and emotion. His poetic inspiration and intuitiveness could not overpower his intellectual reasoning which was dominating both his thought and poetry.

*-"Weak is the Will of Man, His Judgment Blind."

B. Conservatism from 1815-1820

1. Poems of 1816-1817

In 1816 Wordsworth's chief work was the writing of four odes, five sonnets and a few occasional pieces celebrating the downfall of Napoleon.* He became immoderate, ruthless and ungodly. His poems became artificial. It was in this year that the extraordinary poem "Dion" was written. The poem is poorly organized and the main theme is not at all emphasized as it should have been. The poem is very vague and this may be attributed to his still unsettled moral attitude. It is quite unlike any of his other poetry. But the "Thanksgiving Ode" sounds the last knell of the poet. The opening lines;

"Hail, orient Conqueror of gloomy Night!
Thou that canst shed the bliss of gratitude
On hearts howe'en insensible or rude;
Whether thy punctual visitations smite
The haughty towers where monarchs dwell;"

prove, beyond a doubt that the "gleam" of Wordsworth's early and intuitive poetry had gone. Here, there is sadness, dullness, and conservativeness.

The year of 1817 was uneventful and quiet for the poet. "The Vernal Ode", one of his worst poems, and "The Pass of Kirkstone", one of his best poems, were written. During 1818, he was engaged in practical politics. What a contrast for a man who loved Nature as he did! His poems of this year were most depressing and didactic; they became

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artificial, forced and were merely occasional pieces.* The poems were "Star and the Glow-worm", five "Inscriptions" and lines "Composed upon an Evening of extraordinary Splendour and Beauty". The latter poem was really the last of his great work. After this, the magic of his genius disappeared; it was beyond recall. Slowly replacing it was didacticism, moral teaching and instruction.

2. Changes in Wordsworth and in Society

In order to maintain his interest in the progress of the world Wordsworth would have had to keep up with the times; but instead of doing this he continued to be a rabid conservatist. He disclaimed novel ideas, he did not read any new books, he did not mingle with society, he became irritable and fearful of any changes. As time progressed, a new society and religion became established, but Wordsworth was too much out of contact with things to realize either movement. As a result, he resented the state of conditions in general; ultimately, it made him most conservative. So conservative did he become(for he opposed the 1832 Reform Bill and supported the old Poor Law,) that he gained the reputation of being a Tory. There is no denying that he was conservative and most conventional. Perhaps where this is best illustrated is in his thoughts of and feelings toward society in his later poetry. Some of his utterings are not quite as sound as others on contemporary movements and people, but he sincerely and vigorously defended and maintained them. He had always been,

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and was to the end of his life, a friend of the common people; and it is most evident in any of Wordsworth's poetry. One proof of this, for example, is the hero of "The Excursion". Again, in his poems of "Lucy" or in the "Leech-gatherer" there is a cry for the individual man; but in his sonnets on liberty, there is a cry for human lives as a body. His writings have a significant understanding of society as a whole, and mankind as an individual.

3. Tour of Continent

In 1820, there were new issues of Wordsworth's works, there were new poems and there were journeys throughout Europe. Between 1820 and 1837, he travelled through Holland, Belgium, Switzerland and Italy. As a result, sonnets were written concerning different places that had made a lasting impression on him. Upon his return to England, he began composing his "Memorials on the Continent" and the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets".

4. Deterioration of Poetic Power, 1820

After about 1820, it is impossible to deny that there was a steady decline in Wordsworth's poetry. His routine of life continued as it always had, but his vivid imagination, the florified beauty and chivalry of the past and the nobleness of his art gradually decreased until it vanished. As a result, antagonism between the old and the new held sway in Wordsworth's mind and heart. He did not maintain his youthful emotions in writing about Man; and the older he grew, the weaker his poems on Nature became. He never again attained the heights of

enthusiasm and joy which were so characteristic of his earlier poems. His intuitiveness had gone. It was replaced by a sorrowful, reflective conservatism. Wordsworth wrote of the sadness of his own heart and of the melancholy of humanity. His main themes were concerned with great public events. He was skeptical of any disregard of convention. He disfavored the Reform Bill of 1832 and especially the idea of Catholic Emancipation. He was in favor of any movement that would help the working people and he believed in common education. Wordsworth was too much of a conservatist to be a reformer. He despaired of the present, hoped for the future, and lamented about the past.

a. "Duddon Sonnets"

A great many of Wordsworth's later poems were in sonnet form, for this was peculiarly suitable to his reflective moods. In 1820, the "Duddon Sonnets" were published. The poems described the different scenes and events which Wordsworth saw and experienced while travelling through the valley of the River Duddon.

"Mid-Noon is past; upon the sultry mead
No zephyr breathes, no cloud its shadow throws:
If we advance unstrengthened by repose,
Farewell the solace of the vagrant reed!" *

The above lines, or the following from "Journey Renewed" are typical of the sonnets written by Wordsworth in 1820:

*-"Duddon Sonnets" - "The Resting Place"

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"I rose while yet the cattle, half opprest,
Crowded together under rustling trees
Brushed by the current of the water-breeze;
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Glad meetings, tender partings, that upstay
The drooping mind of absence, by vows sworn
In his pure presence near the trysting thorn--
I thanked the leader of my onward way."

In the Duddon sonnets, the course of the river was traced from its source in the mountains near the "Three Sire Stones"* down to Southwaite where it continued on to meet the sea. The idea of writing the poetical history of a river was indeed unique. Naturally, it would have been expected that among the thirty-four sonnets there would have been one or two that were picturesque or romantic; but they were all very much restrained and mechanically written. Gone is the insight, the warmth of emotion and the intuitive power of the poet's earlier work. There was only one that may be termed as beautiful; even in this one, Wordsworth's conservative and reflective characteristics are dominant. He called it "After-Thought" and it is the last one of the series:

"I Thought of Thee, my partner and my guide,
As being past away. -- Vain sympathies!
For, backward, Duddon, as I cast my eyes,
I see what was, and is, and will abide;
Still glides the Stream, and shall forever glide;

*- "Wordsworth, His Life and Works" Vol II. A.J.Symington

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The Form remains, the Function never dies;
While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
We Men, who in our morn of youth defied
The elements, must vanish; be it so.
Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour;
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, and faith's
transcendent dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know."

Throughout this entire body of verse the word "Nature" was not used more than four or five times*, for Wordsworth dealt with the religious faith of his later years rather than with his faith in Nature of his younger days. When he chose such a subject to write upon, he plainly manifested the drastic change which had taken place in him during the last half of his life. The verses of "The Stepping-Stones" (one of "The River Duddon" Sonnets) illustrates this transition very clearly:

The struggling Rill insensibly is grown
Into a Brook of loud and stately march,
Crossed ever and anon by plank or arch;
And, for like use, lo! what might seem a zone
Chosen for ornament -- stone matched with stone
In studied symmetry, with interspace
For the clear waters to pursue their race

*-"Wordsworth" -- E. Hershey Sneath

Without restraint. How swiftly have they flown
Succeeding -- still succeeding! Here the Child
Puts, when the high-swoln Flood runs fierce
and wild,
His budding courage to the proof; and here
Declining Manhood learns to note the sly
And sure encroachments of infirmity,
Thinking how fast time runs, life's end
how near!"

b. Nature Poems

The nature poems were the least affected by the poet's loss of poetic imagination; but, regardless, the old vision is lacking. There is no better way to show the transition of Wordsworth's intuitiveness to his conservatism than by comparing the first stanzas of the two poems written to "The Skylark"

"Up with me! up with me into the clouds!
For thy song, Lark, is strong;
Up with me, up with me to the clouds!
Singing, singing,
With clouds and sky about thee ringing,
Lift me, guide me till I find
That spot which seems so to thy mind!

In this early poem of 1805 the poet is one with the soaring joy of the bird. Note the difference in the poem written in 1825:

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"Ethereal minstrel! pilgrim of the sky!
Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound?
Or, while the wings aspire, are heart and eye
Both with thy nest upon the dewy ground?
Thy nest which thou canst drop into at will,
Those quivering wings composed, that music still!"

Here Wordsworth as the bird suddenly descended from the sky to the earth. Symbolically, they are both the

"Type of the wise who soar, but never roam,
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!" *

Regardless of the change in the later poetry of Wordsworth it never became ordinary although it did not see into the heart of man nor did it reveal inner meanings. It had become reflective rather than imaginative, occasional rather than inspired, dull rather than buoyant, conservative rather than intuitive.

* - "To a Skylark" - 1825

* - "To a Skylark" - 1820

C. Poetic Decline, 1820-1850

1. "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" 1822

In 1822, the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" were published.* In this series of sonnets Wordsworth traced the history of the Christian Church in England from the consummation of Papal Dominion, to the close of the troubles in the reign of Charles I, to the Restoration to the time in which he (Wordsworth) lived.* This was an elaborate undertaking of a great poet. The poems show that Wordsworth sincerely admired and respected the Church of England and all her ceremonies; on the other hand, they give evidence that he regarded the Roman Catholic Church as the enemy of all that England represented both politically and religiously. They are valuable because they have preserved much important material concerning prominent men and events. The sonnets about the "Translation of the Bible", "The Norman Conquest", or the one on "Canute", "Elizabeth" and the following one upon "Wycliffe" are exemplary of this fact:

"Once more the Church is seized with sudden fear,
And at her call is Wicliffe disinhumed;
Yea, his dry bones to ashes are consumed,
And flung into the brook that travels near;
Forthwith, that ancient Voice which Streams
can hear,
Thus speaks, (That voice which walks upon the wind,
Though seldom heard by busy human kind)--
"As thou these ashes, little Brook! wilt bear

* - "Wordsworth" edited by Andrew J. George
* - "Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth" Introduction by John Morley

Into the Avon, Avon to the tide
Of Severn, Severn to the narrow seas,
Into main Ocean they, this deed accurst
An emblem yields to friends and enemies
How the bold Teacher's Doctrine, sanctified
By truth, shall spread, throughout the world
dispersed."

Some of the sonnets are very, very stately, others are most matter of fact. Perhaps one of the most forced and artificial of the group is "Imaginative Regrets". A few of its verses are as follows:

"Deep is the lamentation! Not alone
From Sages justly honoured by mankind;
But from the ghostly tenants of the wind,
Demons and Spirits, many a dolorous groan
Issues for that dominion overthrown:
Proud Tiber grieves, and far-off Ganges, blind
As his own worshippers: and Nile reclined
Upon his monstrous urn, the farewell moan
Renews."

Little do the above lines represent the poet who was considered Nature's high priest! In poems of objects or events conforming to some common law, Wordsworth does not seem to be Wordsworth at all. The following sonnet on "Baptism" illustrates this very well:

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"Dear be the Church, that, watching o'er the needs
Of Infancy, provides a timely shower
Whose virtue changes to a christian Flower
A Growth from sinful Nature's bed of weeds!--
Fitliest beneath the sacred roof proceeds
The ministration; while parental Love
Looks on, and Grace descendeth from above
As the high service pledges now, now pleads.
There, should vain thoughts outspread their
wings and fly
To meet the coming hours of festal mirth,
The tombs -- which hear and answer that
brief cry,
The Infant's notice of his second birth --
Recall the wandering Soul to sympathy
With what man hopes from Heaven, yet fears
from Earth."

Among the best of the sonnets are the three on "King's College Chapel, Cambridge", and the one on "Mutability" which follows:

"From low to high doth dissolution climb,
And sink from high to low, along a scale
Of awful notes, whose concord shall not fail;
A musical but melancholy chime,
Which they can hear who meddle not with crime,

"Dear be the Church, that, watching o'er the needs
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from Earth."

Among the best of the sonnets are the three on "King's College Chapel, Cambridge", and the one on "Mutability" which follows:

"From low to high doth dissolution climb,
And sink from high to low, along a scale
Of awful notes, whose concord shall not fail;
A musical but melancholy chime,
Which they can hear who meddle not with crime,

Nor avarice, nor over-anxious care.

Truth fails not; but her outward forms that bear

The longest date do melt like frosty rime,

That in the morning whitened hill and plain

And is no more; drop like the tower sublime

Of yesterday, which royally did wear

His crown of weeds, but could not even sustain

Some casual shout that broke the silent air,

Or the unimaginable touch of Time."

Like all the other poetry of Wordsworth's later years, these "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" lack the daring, the sweetness, the mystical gleam and intuitive power which were so prominent when the poet was at the height of his genius. They are though, an authentic history written tranquilly and conservatively.

a. Religious Conservatism

There is no question but what William Wordsworth was one of the greatest religious poets in the history of English literature. There is only one phase of his religious thought that does not compare with his general attitude; this was his point of view of Catholic emancipation. The following "Ecclesiastical Sonnet" is an example of his feeling toward Catholicism:

"Watch, and be firm! for, soul subduing vice,
Heart-killing luxury, on your steps await.
Fair houses, baths and banquets delicate,
And temples flashing, bright as polar ice,
Their radiance through the woods -- may yet suffice
To sap your hardy virtue, and abate

Your love of Him upon whose forehead sate
The crown of thorns; whose life-blood flowed the price
Of your redemption. Shun the insidious arts
That Rome provides, less dreading from her frown
Than from her wily praise, her peaceful gown,
Language, and letters; -- these, though fondly viewed
As humanising graces, are but parts
And instruments of deadliest servitude!*

His discussion of this movement, in the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" is dry and barren. This idea must be credited to his conservatism, which limited his broad-mindedness. The reflective calm of his spirit became a backwardness and timidity of fear of alteration. It was this mood which prevailed in Wordsworth in his later years. As he grew older, his own personal religion became more profound, but his universal Christianity diminished. He had always thought of man in his relations to God, but as the years advanced it was only natural that he dwelled more on the relation of his own soul than on the connection of Man and the universe.* He maintained, however, his belief in the simple man and in the fraternity of mankind. He always attended the church of the common humble man; and in "The Excursion" there is a study of his mountain boyhood church and even in those dreary yet

*-"Theology in English Poets" - Stopford A. Brooke

loyal "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" his faith is still firm.

The keynote to Wordsworth's religious character is three words: "a dedicated spirit"; and his religious utterings which were "thoughts that do often be too deep for tears" were perhaps best exemplified in his great poem, "Ode on Intimations of Immortality". It shows the great depths of the soul and mind of Wordsworth's religious beliefs and theories.

2. Poems from 1823 to 1827

In 1823 only three poems were written by Wordsworth; and they were artificial with only a glimpse of beauty and thought. Imagine Wordsworth writing the following stanza:

"Oh! that our lives, which flee so fast,
In purity were such,
That not an image of the past
Should fear that pencil's touch."*

About this time, the poet's eye-sight became affected and it was very difficult for him to read. His writing almost ceased and melancholy was beginning to dominate him. His art narrowed; in general, he "turned back". In 1824, the only memorable verse written was a conservative and contemplative sonnet to his wife,

"O dear far than light and life are dear".

At this time, Wordsworth, a confirmed conservatist, turned to antiquity for material. He wrote a translation of Virgil and lines on "The Pillar of Trajan". In 1826 he wrote six poems

* "Memory"

the following year, about twenty poems.

3. Loss of friends and decline of Dorothy

At the age of sixty he was physically fit; but at this advanced age, Wordsworth, as everyone, had to part with those he loved best. In 1827, Sir George Beaumont died and two years later Lady Beaumont followed him. Worst of all, in 1831, the beloved Dorothy suffered a mental and physical decline from which she never recovered even though she did outlive her brother.

4. Work from 1828-1837

In his poetry of the first three or four years of this period, there is a decided "pick-up" in both feeling and thought. The style, manner and tone differ from those that he just previously wrote. "The Wishing-Gate" is a poem of the mind and heart. "Devotional Incitements" is of beauty; so is the "Evening Voluntary"; "A Wren's Nest" of 1833 does not compare with "The Sparrow's Nest" of 1801; nor does "Yarrow Revisited" of 1835 compare with "Yarrow Unvisited" of 1803. In 1835 his "Sonnets composed or suggested during a tour in Scotland in the Summer of 1833" were published. With the desire of travel still strong, Wordsworth and his wife visited Italy in the early months of 1837 and returned to England in August of that same year. As a result of this tour about twenty-eight poems were written, the most notable of which are the sonnets on Italian liberty.

2. Changes in Wordsworth and Society

In all of Wordsworth's later poetry, it is evident that his mind was full of sorrow because of the new civilization, which was becoming mechanical and which was to replace the old one. He disliked it principally for two reasons, the first of which was that it supported the desire for riches; and the second reason was that it was unfair to the working man. He had always sympathized with both the working man and the poor. This is easily seen as early as 1793 in the poem of "Guilt and Sorrow" and he maintained this attitude even when he wrote the story of Margaret in the first book of "The Excursion". Wordsworth was about the first to record a protest against the drudgery of the working man under the new industrial system, and his poem of 1829, "Humanity", voices this sentiment vigorously.

Wordsworth's conservatism was a resentment against the industrial system of the age and it was also a disdain for contemporary politics. At this time in life, he had withdrawn from the general society of man and lived in a society of his own. He had already lived through one revolution and he could not bear to experience another. He believed that just such a thing would happen after the Reform Bill of 1832 was established, and he firmly believed that if any changes were at all necessary, they should be very gradual. The poet hoped that there would be a common bond between the classes, that there would be a stronger, wiser government

which would control industry and provide popular education. In short, he hoped that the natural heritage of the working man would not be entirely lost, under the new industrial regime.

6. Complete Conservatism

Wordsworth's later conservatism showed that he had undergone a change: he himself said

"Methinks that to some vacant heritage
My feet would rather turn -- to some dry nook
Scooped out of living rock, and near a brook
Hurled down a mountain-cove from stage to stage
Yet tempering, for my sight, its bustling rage
In the soft heaven of a translucent pool;
Thence creeping under sylvan arches cool
Fit haunt of shapes whose glorious equipage
Would elevate my dreams. A beechen bowl,
A maple dish, my furniture should be;
Crisp, yellow leaves my bed; the hooting owl
My night watch: nor should e'er the crested fowl
From thorp or vill his matins sound for me,
Tired of the world and all its industry."*

With his loss of republicanism, he simultaneously lost his poetic genius in writing of Man, and to a degree, in his writing of Nature. During the last score of years of the poet's life, his literary emotions and impulses were very weak and

*-"Seclusion"

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In the soft heaven of a translucent pool;
Thence creeping under sylvan arches cool
Fit haunt of shapes whose glorious equipage
Would elevate my dreams. A peacock bowl,
A eagle dish, my furniture should be;
Crisp, verdant leaves my bed; the hooting owl
My night watch: nor should e'er the crested fowl
From thorn or wild brier matins sound for me,
Tired of the world and all its industry."*

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his poems were full of conservative thoughts and ideas. He was now a rigid conservative and was in a peaceful attitude of mind; and as he believed, that poetry was "emotion recollected in tranquility", so he wrote. It was this tranquility, both a weakness and a strength, that marked Wordsworth as a conservatist.

7. Popularity

Wordsworth's poetical reputation started to gain prominence about 1835, and it was at its height in 1840. In 1839 he had received a doctor's degree at Oxford and in 1842 he was granted a yearly pension for the remaining years of his life. In this same year a volume of work, "Poems chiefly of Early and Later Years", was published. The poetry of these last years was mostly in didactic form and was of an inferior quality. He made several additions to the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" of 1822. The year 1843 brought Wordsworth the honor of Poet Laureate, on the death of Southey. At first he did not accept this office as he felt that the duties and responsibilities would be too burdensome for a man of his years, but he finally withdrew his objections.

8. Last years and death

In 1847, Wordsworth wrote the "Installation Ode" when the Prince Consort was elected Chancellor of the University of Cambridge. He was to have heard it as it was set to music for this great occasion. This, which would have

given him so much pleasure, was denied for his daughter was dying and it was by her bedside that Wordsworth remained. This tragic event broke the old poet's heart and he never recovered from it; he became more sorrowful and more despondent than ever. On the twenty-third of April in 1850, at the age of eighty years, William Wordsworth died, in the heart of the country in which he lived, and which he loved and of which he had written. He lies among those men whom he had revered, beneath the yew trees which he had planted. What more fitting place could he rest! In Westminster Abbey there is a life size statue of the poet in white marble, seated, in the attitude of contemplation.

"Plain is the stone that marks the poet's rest;
Not marble worked beneath Italian skies--
A grey slate headstone tells where Wordsworth lies,
Cleft from the native hills he loved the best,
No heavier thing upon his gentle breast
Than turf starred o'er in spring with daisy eyes,
Nor richer music makes him lullabies
Than Rotha fresh from yonder mountain crest,
His name, his date, the years he lived to sing,
Are deep incised and eloquently terse;
But Fancy hears the graver's hammer ring,
And sees mid lines of much remembered verse
These words in gold beneath his title wrought--
"Singer of Humble Themes and Nobler Thought"."*

*-H. D. Rownsley

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"Singer of Humble Themes and Nobler Thought".**

*-H. D. Rowbotham

III. GENERAL COMPREHENSIVE SUMMARY

1. Age and aims of Wordsworth

William Wordsworth's "healing power", as Matthew Arnold calls it, established the poet as the high priest in English literature. There is a pureness in all of his poetry that arouses and elevates. This characteristic could only be of a man who was of a lofty nature, a man who was well-trained and restrained in life, with a high purpose and ideal.

He wrote in an age of sensationalism, an age that was pervaded with natural emotions; and yet he wrote of the simple and serene life, of quiet, unassuming people. To the worldly he wrote of unworldliness, to the worried and perplexed he wrote of peace and hope. His writings mirror his own soul.

"With heart as calm as lakes that sleep,
Or mountain-torrents, where they creep
Along a channel smooth and deep,
To their own far-off murmurs listening."*

Wordsworth was, throughout his life, most interested in Man and his destiny. He was interested in the political and industrial movements of England because they were of importance to the welfare and happiness of Man. He turned aside the different theories of democracy that he encountered, and, as he thought, became interested in the more useful problems of his time.

a. The French Revolution

*- "Memory" 1823

Probably no other poet had ever gone through such a mental and spiritual battle as did Wordsworth. The French Revolution was of great importance to him because it affected his entire life. The ideas and emotions that he countenanced during this horror became permanent acquirements. At this time, he was jubilant, optimistic and buoyant; but this state of soul and attitude of mind was not of long duration. So infatuated was he with Liberty that he wrote a series of sonnets concerning the liberty of Mankind. But when he saw Man subjugated to tyranny he banished the theories of politics and industry from his mind.

3. Faith lost and regained

The poet became calm and introverted. He lost interest in current events and people. He became despondent. He doubted both God and man. This period of doubt was followed very quickly by a regained faith which resulted in optimism. He again rejoiced in Nature and in Man.

4. Seclusion and Transition

From Wordsworth's twenty-fifth year of life his principles never changed. They were conservative -- the consequence of that terrific struggle. He had withdrawn from society and narrowed himself in every phase of living. After having written about Man, Nature, and their relation to each other, he slowly discarded them for public questions. As has been stated, "The Excursion" is a transition poem,

bridging the two periods of Wordsworth's life. The themes of this poem are not at all like those of his earlier poetry.

5. Division of Poetry

Wordsworth's poetry may be divided into three distinct kinds. First were the poems like the "Lyrical Ballads", which were simple in style and mainly lyrical. The second division of poems was an interfusion of his simple and stately style and includes most of his ballads. The last division claims such poems as "Laodamia", poems of a grandiose style; this division included most of the sonnets. It was in 1810 that Wordsworth's intuitiveness vanished and was replaced by conservatism.

6. Conservatism

The later poetry, lacking the "gleam" and seeing power, was full of reflective contemplation. The joy and sweetness were replaced by dull, stately thoughts. Life seems to have left the verses. There is no imagination. Worse still, there is no inspiration. The spiritualness and charm are gone. In his conservative years, after he had given up his interest in the theories of Man, his genius faded slowly until it finally died out, and the prose of life dominated the poetry of humanity. The outstanding characteristic of Wordsworth's later poetry is its sadness. This is a positive proof that intuitiveness had gone, for the seer cannot stand sorrow. His thought was conservative and his soul was

peaceful. As he became older he became sadder, less emotional and more believing. His melancholy was most pronounced and his poems were sombre and reserved. His conservatism is not to be wondered at; it is rather to be expected that an isolated man would become antagonistic to the new civilization. Even after his poetry had become conservative, even after he, himself, was conservative, he maintained his belief in God. This gave him the power, in his younger days, to exercise his genius in his poetry of Man and Nature, and forget himself. In his later and reserved days, it gave him strength to believe in the future. He maintained, to the end, his ideas and ideals of Man, Nature, and Life. As Matthew Arnold said:

"The poet, to whose mighty heart
Heaven doth a quicker pulse impart,
Subdues that energy to scan
Not his own course, but that of man.
Though he move mountains, though his day
Be passed on the proud heights of sway,
Though he hath loosed a thousand chains,
Though he hath borne immortal pains,
Action and suffering though he know--
He hath not lived, if he lives so."

Matthew Arnold.

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